

## *Facts from 1996 Farm Progress Days*

“If you build it they will come.” This is a direct quote from a paper in April 1993 about the last Farm Technology Days (FTD) event that took place in Marathon County on the Ross-Hart Farm. Also stated in that same article was “About 120,000 visitors will descend on a Marathon County Farm in July 1996 to see the latest in farm products, services, equipment and techniques demonstrated. Farm Progress Days is a big deal.”

In 1993 Marathon County was chosen to host the Farm Progress Days show for 1996. The executive committee which consisted of Kenneth Sipple, Executive Chairman; Hugo Seubert Jr., Vice Chairman; Michael Wildeck, Executive Secretary; Dave Svacina, Treasurer; Frank Zebro, DuWayne Zamzow, Linda Christensen, Guy Fredel, Sandi Cihlar, Elizabeth Hewey, Kenneth Dirks, Gary Belanger, Richard Leick, Duane Wolding, Jack Christen, Loddie Loskot, and Jamie Hanke serving as the Farm Progress Day Coordinator. Selection of a show site began by posting ads and sending applications to various farms throughout Marathon County. At that time, the criteria to be the host farm were:

1. The farmstead and major land owned must be in Marathon County. A minimum of 350-400 acres is needed for the show.
2. Have good access to parking area or areas from at least two directions readily available by good roads with a good traffic flow pattern.
3. Land should be under the control of one operator with a maximum of two acceptable. Also, rental agreements must be shared with the Farm Progress Day's Executive Committee to ensure that property will be in operator's control through 1996.
4. Land owner must be willing to cooperate with the committee on use of cropping acres and must be willing to sign a written agreement to this effect.
5. The owner must understand that at least 160 acres of reasonably level land, in sod, will be used for Tent City, exhibitor parking, general parking and demonstration plot area.
6. In addition to the acres, approximately 200 acres of hay must be available for harvesting during the three day event.
7. Owner must have adequate silo space available and facilities for haylage and baled hay.
8. Finalist will be expected to provide statement of financial condition.

The Marathon County Farm Progress Days Committee announced that Ross-Hart Farms at the Highway 29 and County Highway S intersection between Marathon and Edgar had been selected as the host farm. The Ross-Hart operation was chosen because of the diversity of the farm. The family milked their herd of 225 Holsteins in 3 barns, two were stanchion and one had a milking parlor. The young stock included 203 heifers, 47 calves, and 130 Holstein steers. Also of interest to the selection committee was the variety of crops including 50 acres of ginseng. Ross-Hart planted 550 acres of corn and 400 acres of alfalfa, with 150 acres of rye and 175 acres of oats. To their credit they were one of the first farms in the county to plant no-till corn, starting in the mid 1980s. The farm contained 15 miles of sod waterways and about 25 miles of field-drain tiles.

The theme for the show came from a fourth grade student. Laura Neville, age 10, is quoted as saying, “I was just thinking about farming and stuff and what they do.” That is when she submitted five different entries and “Marathon County 1996, Producing for the World” was chosen.

Also fairly new to the family and the show was Internet. It was the first time that Farm Progress Days planners employed this technology. Organizers said linking to computer users globally was a natural move in light of the show's focus.

In the weeks leading up to the show, Mother Nature dumped 8.7 inches of rain on the Wausau area. The average amount of precipitation for June had been 4.01! The Farm Progress Days committee claimed not to be worried. Part of the planning for the show had included ways to drain rain and excess water from the site. The first day of the show arrived with perfect weather. The Country Today on Wednesday July 17<sup>th</sup> is quoted as saying, "The sun broke brightly over the eastern horizon Tuesday morning, and that made Ken Sipple a happy man."

Overall the show was a success! Heavy rainfall overnight on Wednesday into Thursday morning did not dampen the enthusiasm of a record number of people (up until that date) from attending the show. The show had been scheduled to close at 4:30pm on Thursday, but was evacuated ½ hour early due to heavy storms heading for the show site, and the National Weather Service issuing a Tornado warning for Marathon County.